



ROCKY MOUNTAIN COLLEGE

Race and Class in America

Course Syllabus

Spring 2013

POL 327
TTh 1:00-2:15
Tech Hall 15b

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Course Description:

Despite substantial efforts to provide economic opportunity for all Americans, a large and ethnically-diverse underclass remains. In an effort to explain this phenomenon, this course directly confronts American perceptions on wealth, poverty, race, and gender, in order to more fully understand the confluence and contradictions among them. Course materials will include historical accounts, personal narratives, and sociopolitical analyses that explore concepts such as whiteness and blackness, and explain the cultural and structural factors which limit life-chances and prevent many from claiming their share of the elusive “American Dream.”

Content Warning:

The books that we will read and the films we will watch throughout the semester will contain profane language and descriptive phrasing related to race relations which might make an individual student uncomfortable. If you believe that such content will upset you in any way, it is advised that you do not take this course.

Required Texts:

Sherman Alexie, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*

Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice*

Ralf Dahrendorf, *Life Chances* (handout)

Frantz Fanon, *White Skin, Black Masks*

Jim Goad, *The Redneck Manifesto*

Carl Jung, "Your Negroid and Indian Behavior" (handout)

Kirby Moss, *The Color of Class*

New York Times (various authors), *Class Matters* (handout)

David Shipler, *The Working Poor*

Paul Sniderman and Edward Carmines, *Reaching Beyond Race*

Supplemental readings will be handed out in class or can be obtained online.

Course Policies:

The first requirement of each student is to understand that this is an academic environment and as such it is necessary that there is a high degree of civility, respect for fellow students, and respect for the material. You are expected to do *all* assigned readings, and you must participate in class if you hope to earn a passing grade.

1. Missed Classes: This course covers a great deal of material and meets just twice a week; therefore repeated absences will not be tolerated. Students are allowed three absences, regardless of circumstance. Subsequent absences will result in your course grade being rescaled down by 1/3; i.e. a student with six absences will have their final grade reduced 1 point on a 4.0 scale.
2. Missed Assignments: If you do not turn in a graded assignment your maximum grade in the course will be rescaled along a 90/80/70/60 scale; i.e. if you fail to hand in a paper worth 20 percent of your grade, your highest possible grade in the class will be a B, regardless of your average on a 4-point scale.
3. Late Papers: Papers will lose one full letter grade per class session late. No exceptions.
4. Plagiarism and Cheating: Neither will be tolerated, and if a student is caught doing either they will fail the course and I will recommend to the Dean of Students that said student be expelled from school.
5. Electronic Devices: the use of any electronic device is strictly prohibited in this course. This includes e-readers, as I will not participate in the demise of the written word.
6. Email: I check my email daily but I prefer not to use it as a means of conversation. Email should be used only for quick, non-emergency questions and for setting up appointments for face-to-face meetings in my office. Also, for institutional as well as technological reasons, only communicate with me via your official @rocky.edu account.

Assessment Outcomes:

In this course, the following History & Political Science major assessment criteria are advanced:

1. Analyze, interpret, and critically evaluate major political issues and/or historical events;
2. Demonstrate familiarity with the major theories and thinkers in the field;
5. Assess, use, and synthesize different kinds of evidence from a variety of academic sources;
6. Understand the difference between opinions and substantiated scholarly claims;
7. Effectively utilize and appropriately cite academic sources;
8. Write papers essentially free of errors in grammar, mechanics, and spelling.

Graded Assignments:

Review Essays:

Following the trifurcated outline of the course, you are required to write two 5-7 page review essays that explore the themes discussed within each segment of the course, and a third, comprehensive essay (12-15 pages) that explores the totality of our readings for the semester. Handouts will be distributed to help guide you, but in general these papers will have the broad goal of explaining the overarching messages and meanings of the books read in each unit, in a comparative manner and review-essay style. Review essays will not require any outside research – in fact, no outside research will be allowed (in order to keep you focused on the materials read throughout the semester).

Note: papers should be composed in 12 pt. Times New Roman font, double spaced, with normal one-inch margins and stapled. Papers will lose 1/3 of a grade if they exceed the stated limits, are not paginated properly, or are not stapled. Late papers will lose one full grade per day late.

Reading Quizzes:

There will be numerous quizzes given throughout the semester, the exact number will depend on rates of participation in course discussions and whether students come to class prepared. Reading quizzes are rudimentary examinations used to determine who is and who is not doing assigned readings; a student who fails a quiz will be counted absent for that class session, thus diminishing their overall grade as delineated in Course Policy 1.

Grading:

Papers will be graded on an A-F scale and will be averaged as follows:

Review Essays 1 & 2:	20 percent each
Review Essay 3:	40 percent
Participation:	20 percent

Grading Criteria:

These are the standards I adhere to when I grade essays. Pluses and minuses represent shades of difference, as do split grades (e.g. B-/C+). Grades are based on the evidence of the essay submitted, not on effort or time spent.

A

Excellent in every way (this is not the same as perfect). This is an ambitious, perceptive essay that grapples with interesting, complex ideas; responds discerningly to counter-arguments; and explores well-chosen evidence revealingly. The analysis enhances, rather than underscores, the reader's and writer's knowledge (it doesn't simply repeat what has been taught). There is a context for all the ideas; someone outside the class would be enriched, not confused, by reading the essay. Its introduction opens up, rather than flatly announces, its thesis. Its conclusion is something more than a summary. The language is clean, precise, often elegant. The reader should feel enlightened and educated for having read the paper. There's something new in your analysis, something perhaps only you could have written and explored, in this particular way. The writer's stake in the material is obvious.

B

A piece of writing that reaches high and achieves many of its aims. The ideas are solid and progressively explored but some thin patches require more analysis and/or some stray thoughts don't fit in. The language is generally clear and precise but occasionally not. The evidence is relevant, but there may be too little; the context for the evidence may not be sufficiently explored, so that I have to make some of the connections that the writer should have made clear for me. This is a solid essay whose reasoning and argument may nonetheless be rather routine (the limitation is largely conceptual).

C

A piece of writing that has real problems in one of these areas: conception (there's at least one main idea but it is fuzzy and difficult to understand); structure (non-linear development of your ideas); use of textual evidence (weak or non-existent -- the connections among the ideas and the evidence are not made and/or are presented without context, or are simple platitudes and generalizations); language (the sentences are often awkward, dependent on unexplained abstractions, sometimes contradict each other). The essay may not move forward but rather may repeat its main points, or it may touch upon many (and apparently unrelated) ideas without exploring any of them in sufficient depth and without a developmental flow. Punctuation, spelling, grammar, paragraphing, and transitions may be a problem.
-or- an essay that is largely plot summary or "interpretive summary" of the text, but is written without major problems.

-or- an essay that is chiefly a personal reaction to something. Well-written, but scant intellectual content -- mostly opinion.

D and F

These are efforts that are wildly shorter than they ought to be to grapple seriously with ideas.

-or- those that are extremely problematic in many of the areas mentioned above: aims, structure, use of evidence, language, etc.;

-or- those that do not come close to addressing the expectations of the essay assignment.

Participation:

The majority of class time will be devoted to discussion of the assigned readings. Discussion can include (but is not limited to) an analysis and/or critique of the author's position, a comparison of the assigned work to another text, or debate as to the meaning or merit of a given work (or particular points therein).

Class participation is evaluated on quality rather than quantity. Comments need not mirror the position of the author (or the professor). You are graded not on the "correctness" of your position, but rather on your analysis of the material and your ability to articulate your ideas. You don't have to be at the center of every debate, but students who make little or no effort to enter discussions will receive a lower participation grade. Discussion will become lively, heated even. Always respect the positions of others. When you disagree with someone, be sure to criticize the *idea* and not the person.

Participation will be graded according to the following criteria:

A

The student in this grade range arrives in class each day thoroughly prepared with comments and questions on the assigned reading. Comments reveal that the student has read carefully; this student occasionally initiates the discussion without waiting for the professor to do so. This student does not, however, try to dominate the class, but listens carefully to the remarks made by fellow class members, and responds as readily to these as to the instructor's questions.

B

The student in this grade range participates in most discussions, although not as fully or reliably as the student described above. There is evidence of having done the reading. This student pays attention to the comments of the other students.

C

The student in this grade range participates only intermittently, and is more willing to discuss broad, general questions than to engage in concrete analysis of an assigned text. Sometimes unprepared, this student lacks interest in the ideas of other members of the class, neglects to bring the proper text to class, and is often inattentive.

D or F

The student in this grade range seldom if ever participates.

Things that lower your participation grade:

- * Not paying attention in class
- * A ringing cellphone
- * Talking to your neighbor or holding conversations separate from the class discussion
- * A student who is seen using their phone for any reason will receive an F as their final grade in the course

NOTE: Unlike paper grades, participation will *not* be given plus/minus or split grades, and your final grade is weighted in a manner such as to make it impossible for you to receive an A for the course if your participation grade is not an A.

Semester Schedule:

Week 1:

1/8

Introduction and Course Outline

1/10

Overview of *The Sociological Imagination* (handout)
Dahrendorf, *Life Chances*, Chapter 2 (handout)

Week 2:

1/15

The New York Times, *Class Matters*, Chapters 1, 6 (handout)

1/17

The New York Times, *Class Matters*, Chapters 7, 8 (handout)

Week 3:

1/22

Shipler, *The Working Poor*, Introduction, Chapter 1

1/24

Shipler, *The Working Poor*, Chapters 5

Week 4:

1/29

Shipler, *The Working Poor*, Chapters 7 (174-193), 10 (282-284)

1/31

Moss, *The Color of Class*, Introduction, Chapter 1

Week 5:

2/5

Moss, *The Color of Class*, Chapters 2-4

2/7

Moss, *The Color of Class*, Chapters 5-7

Week 6:

2/12

REVIEW ESSAY 1 DUE

2/14

Film: *American Movie*

Week 7:

2/19

Cleaver, *Soul on Ice*, "On Becoming"
"Initial Reactions on the Assassination of Malcolm X"

2/21

Cleaver, *Soul on Ice*, "The White Race and its Heros"

Week 8:

2/26

Cleaver, *Soul on Ice*, "Lazarus, Come Forth"
"Domestic Law and International Order"

2/28

Cleaver, *Soul on Ice*, "The Allegory of the Black Eunuchs"
"Convalescence"

3/4-3-8

Midterm Break

Week 9:

3/12

Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Introduction, Chapter 5

3/14

Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Chapter 6

Week 10:

3/19

Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Chapter 7 & 8

3/21

Goad, *The Redneck Manifesto*, Chapters 1 & 2

Week 11:

3/26

Goad, *The Redneck Manifesto*, Chapters 5 & 6 (124-131)

3/28

Goad, *The Redneck Manifesto*, Chapters 8 & 9

Week 12:

4/2

Goad, *The Redneck Manifesto*, Chapter 10

4/4

Carl Jung, "Your Negroid and Indian Behavior" (handout)

Week 13:

4/9

REVIEW ESSAY 2 DUE

4/11

Film: *Native Son*

Week 14:

4/16

Sniderman and Carmines, *Reaching Beyond Race*, Chapter 1 (handout)

4/18

Sniderman and Carmines, *Reaching Beyond Race*, Chapters 4, 5 (handout)

Week 15:

4/23

Alexie, *Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, pp. 1-127

4/25

Alexie, *Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, pp. 128-230

4/30

REVIEW ESSAY 3 DUE